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SUBJECT: SUBJECT: HELMAND: A REINTEGRATION ASSESSMENT

Classified By: Acting IPA Coordinator Hoyt B. Yee, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S/REL to USA, ISAF, NATO) Summary: Helmand Province, particularly in parts of the south, is already undergoing de facto reintegration of some Taliban forces on an informal basis, with no involvement from coalition forces or GIRoA. Both Nawa and Garmisir Districts have community councils, composed of a large percentage of former Taliban. In a low-key informal manner, the District Governors of each area have accepted certain mid-level community leaders, thought to be former Taliban, into the local governance process. The areas where informal reintegration are taking place have two things in common: (1) a robust military presence by the Marines or the British Army, with good relationships with the community; and (2) the consequential establishment of sub-national governance under GIRoA leadership. A formal reintegration process, using the local community to hold reintegration shuras, will likely be successful in Nawa and possible Shin Kolay in the British Area of Operations (AO). A survey of village elders along the corridor between Nawa and Garmisir also indicates strong support to welcoming those Taliban willing to reintegrate. Garmisir needs more time, as kinetic activities still take place within 10 kilometers. Once Marjah has been cleared, it is anticipated more areas in Garmisir may be ready for reintegration as that operation, along with an additional Afghan National Army (ANA) Kandak (battalion) tentatively scheduled to arrive in Garmisir in December, may well serve as the added impetus to achieve formal reintegration in Garmisir. End Summary.

BACKGROUND TO THE ASSESSMENT

¶2. (S/REL to USA, ISAF, NATO) In Helmand Province data suggests that reintegration efforts may be moving forward. On October 23, 2009, the Human Terrain Team at US Marine Regional Combat Team 7 conducted site surveys with village elders along the Route 605 corridor between Nawa and Garmisir. A sampling consisting of 57 village elders were interviewed and four questions were asked:

- What does the local population think about reintegration of former Taliban?
- Who should deliver the message of reintegration: ISAF, GIRoA, Provincial Governor, District Governor, local village elders, mullahs?
- What would the community accept as proper measures to accept Taliban into the community?
- What programs and policies would entice the Taliban to reintegrate?

¶3. (S/REL to USA, ISAF, NATO) Eighty percent of the respondents "expressed a willingness to welcome back former Taliban members. All but ten respondents cited the village elder as the key participant for the local shura. Although the Human Terrain Team's report had different opinions

expressed in response to the last two questions, including some commentary that Taliban members might be loathe to appear at a public shura, the majority view favored a reintegration shura, albeit with lots of caveats.

¶4. (S/REL to USA, ISAF, NATO) These responses correlated exactly with the sentiments expressed to Regional Platform/South and DST officers by the District Governor of Nawa, the Deputy District Governor of Garmsir, and numerous local elders and mullahs. These views clearly indicated that the focus should be on the local village leaders to conduct reintegration shuras, as they alone have the connections and credibility with local Taliban members in their villages.

THE BRITISH PERSPECTIVE

¶5. (S/REL to USA, ISAF, NATO) Our discussions with our British military and civilian colleagues suggest they are keen to join the reintegration effort but due to the fact that an Irish national and a British UNAMA employee were declared persona non grata by President Karzai two years ago for perceived negotiations with the Taliban, they are averse to conducting formal reintegration shuras without clear guidance from the Karzai regime. To some extent this has already been accomplished by Karzai's inaugural speech, in which he mentioned his commitment to the reintegration process. Further, more explicit directives to his Governors are anticipated in the near future. The District Governors will need follow on guidance from their Governor on this issue. With this in mind, the British contingent agreed, at

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a meeting in September with the Marines, to form a reintegration cell at the Helmand PRT for the purpose of vetting reintegrating Taliban members. This will be done with the Provincial head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) as well as the other stakeholders. A further plus favoring British involvement is that their long presence in Helmand has resulted in relationships with those who have ties with the Taliban on an informal basis and these can be exploited when formal reintegration occurs.

NAWA

¶6. (S/REL to USA, ISAF, NATO) Deputy Governor Abdul Manaf is enthusiastic about the notion of holding a reintegration shura, claiming the people are ready. He attributes this latter to the Marine presence in his district, which has allowed people to feel secure. He further reported that there are four Taliban commanders from his district, all of whom are in Marjah, and once that area is cleared, security will be further improved. Two factors mitigate this enthusiasm, however: the Marine battalion in his district will be replaced in a few weeks; and there is a need for the replacement battalion to get its feet on the ground and establish its own relationships with the locals. Further, as an indication of the fragile nature of security in Nawa, the District Governor reported that the majority of the members of the community council have been sleeping in his compound, due to the recent assassinations of three other council members. Reintegration in Nawa will almost certainly result in an increased security threat against those who reintegrate as well as those who participate in the shura. The targets will most likely be the reintegrees, as a lesson to active Taliban members. The reintegration shura in Nawa may well benefit by being timed to coincide with the Marjah operation and would also benefit from a coordinated information operation (IO) campaign beforehand.

GARMSIR

¶7. (S/REL to USA, ISAF, NATO) Garmsir presents a somewhat different political dynamic than Nawa in that it is larger, closer to kinetic activities just ten kilometers south and the security situation will require additional time, perhaps several more months, before there's a local Afghan consensus concerning the viability of a formal reintegration shura. Discussions with the Deputy District Governor (the District Governor was out of town during this assessment), village elders and community council members made clear that reintegration is wanted and needed, but security improvements need to be made first. All pointed out that reintegration was already taking place on an informal basis, with perhaps a majority of the community council having former Taliban ties. The Marine civil affairs team in Garmsir pointed out the expected arrival of an ANA Kandak in December. This, coupled with the anticipated Marjah clearing operation, may well provide the impetus needed for formal reintegration to occur.

¶8. (S/REL to USA, ISAF, NATO) COMMENT: Helmand Province is ready to start formal reintegration shuras within the next two months, one in the British AO and one in Nawa. In Garmsir, outreaches by village locals are taking place and these may well result in a successful shura some months from now. This assessment revealed the critical importance of both the appearance of security as well as the reality of a security presence on the ground. On a related note, there have been continuing requests for Afghan bodyguards from members of the community councils. Once this is dealt with, either as a force connected to the ANP or some other GIRoA entity to alleviate fears of setting up a private militia, the improved security environment will greatly enhance the prospects for reintegration. Helmand PRT, through its personnel in the field, will remain in close contact remain in close contact with village elders and encourage Afghan-led reintegration. PRT will also urge Afghan security forces and NDS to work toward establishment of a more visible and effective security presence in the area. End Comment.

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